

Mayor Thomas M. Menino
Testimony before the Joint Committee on Education
May 7, 2013
As Prepared for Delivery

Madame Chairs, and members of the Committee, thank you for having me here this morning.

In 2010, I pushed for new in-district charter schools and new tools to help our underperforming schools. But I tore up my knee, so I based our full-court education reform campaign out of my living room.

And together, we worked to pass one of the best education reform bills in our state's history. In my 20 years being Mayor that was one of my proudest accomplishments.

I'm here three years later to tell you that those reforms are working and that we should extend them. I'm asking for your support of House bill 529.

I have 244 days left in my term. Like I did in 2010, I am going to push each and every day for this legislation. And call me superstitious, but I even broke my leg for good measure.

I know there are a handful of education reform bills before you today. I want to work together with anyone in this room who cares about doing what is right for our children. I will support any bill that does 2 key things:

First, let us extend "turn-around" powers to more schools. In our "turn-around schools," we have the flexibility to intervene and innovate – but only in our lowest performing, Level 4 schools. We need this flexibility in the Level 3 schools that are struggling near the bottom.

My bill will extend "turn-around" powers and support grants to Level 3 schools. We should not have to wait for a school to fail before we give it the tools to succeed.

And second, let us create more in-district charter schools. My bill would eliminate the cap on In-District (or Horace Mann) charter schools and allow for these schools to renew after 5 years without a union veto. Scott Given is here from UP Academy. He'll talk to you more about the success he had in transforming the Gavin Middle School in South Boston.

He used the charter school model but he came into our district, and our school, and employed our union teachers. And this is the best part, he taught the kids that were already at the school.

The results are off the charts. That's why I'm so glad Scott is taking this approach to the Marshall School next year. I encourage you to advance a bill that allows for more of these schools, with fewer restrictions.

Now, there are a lot of folks here today who want more charter schools. They will ask you to lift the cap on commonwealth charter schools – these are the ones that operate outside of our local school districts.

I don't think we need to lift the cap on commonwealth charters because we shouldn't make families change schools and wait years to get something better. In Boston we are using in-district charter schools to seek immediate results.

For those charter operators who are here today to ask you to lift the cap, I have a challenge for them: Come take over a BPS school and make it an in-district charter. You'll have the building, you'll be able to teach the kids who are already in the school, and they won't have to wait for something better. Just promise that you'll educate all of our kids, in the schools that need you now, and we are ready to move.

And, we have the track record to prove that it works. To the families here today, I say – we don't need to wait five years, ten years for charter schools to expand. We're ready to do it right now here in Boston.

I encourage this Committee to move quickly on this important legislation. I would tell you I have 8 months left to make this happen – but that's too long. Our kids need action today. Thank you for your time and consideration of my proposals.